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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3284
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5532
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3252
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3117
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3775
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001018

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, INL/AAE BUHLER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: COMMANDER ARRESTED FOR
HEROIN TRAFFICKING

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: A commander of a military Unit in Tejen Etrap (District) was reportedly arrested last week for drug smuggling. While the Defense Ministry was embarrassed by the case, officers from the same military unit commented positively on the commander's performance of his professional duties. The involvement of high ranking military officers in drug trafficking across the border appears to be a fairly common occurrence, rather than an exception, in Turkmenistan. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) A military officer acquaintance of an Embassy staff person reported that a captain, Commander of the Air Force/Air Defense Military Unit of Tejen Etrap (near the Iranian border), Ahal Province, was arrested last week for attempting to smuggle seven kilos of heroin. The Commander's wife was also detained for being involved in the "business." The incident was revealed by Deputy Minister of Defense Gundogdyev (Turkmenistan's former Military Attache to the U.S.) during the pin-on ceremony at the Military Division in Bekreve (outskirts of Ashgabat) on August 8. LTC Gundogdyev said in his opening remarks, "Unfortunately, together with the good news, we have some bad news..." and, referring to the incident in Tejen, the Deputy Minister pointed out that "such cases undermine the lofty title of the military officer."

14. (SBU) A lieutenant from the same military unit in Tejen, in conversation with a military acquaintance of Embassy staff member, commented positively on the arrested captain, noting that the Commander had done a lot for the military unit. According to him, the Commander

refurbished all buildings used by his military unit, installed air conditioning systems, refrigerators and TV sets. "His personal office looked like a five star business office," the lieutenant said. Reportedly, the Commander paid for the renovations and installations from his own pocket.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: High-ranking military officers, usually Soviet-Afghan war veterans, were the first to open smuggling routes from Iran and Afghanistan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. For example, an acquaintance of Embassy staff person's late uncle, a colonel with the Ministry of Defense, Afghan war veteran and fluent Persian speaker, used to travel frequently to Iran and bring heroin in the tires of his personal SUV. By showing a military ID, an officer would be allowed to drive thru the green corridor at any border crossing check point.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: There have been rumors of official involvement in drug smuggling in Turkmenistan. It seems likely that there are at least some officials taking advantage of their rank and position to profit from this activity. The real question is when they are caught: are they punished? It looks like a "yes" for this captain. END COMMENT.

MILES